

## Message Text

SECRET

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17

ORIGIN NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 PM-03 PRS-01 SAJ-01 SP-02

NSC-05 CIAE-00 NSCE-00 DODE-00 /038 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:PKBULLEN:GCB

APPROVED BY NEA:HHAUNDERS

INR/RNA:TMCANDREW

NEA/ARN:DAKORN

----- 008467

R 150139Z APR 75

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T STATE 085362

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY

SUBJECT: SITUATION IN SYRIA

REF: BEIRUT 3501; 4451

1. FOLLOWING IS ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD'S POSITION EXTRACTED FROM DAMASCUS 1146. YOU MAY PASS SUBSTANCE TO TAQLA AND/OR DIB IN RESPONSE THEIR INQUIRIES. YOU SHOULD STRESS THAT THIS IS BEING PROVIDED IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE BUT SHOULD NOT ATTRIBUTE IT TO EMBASSY DAMASCUS. IN SUMMARY WE RATE ASAD'S OVERALL POSITION AS STRONG, DESPITE HIS FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC CRITICS AND OBVIOUS POLICY RESTRAINTS OF SITUATION.

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2. FACT THAT SYRIA EARLIER TOOK A HARDLINE POSITION MAKES ASAD A TARGET FOR ENTICEMENT AND PRESSURE FROM RADICAL SIDE REPRESENTED BY IRAQ, LIBYA, ALGERIA, AND PALESTINIAN EXTREMISTS. ASAD'S SPONSORSHIP OF SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN JOINT MILITARY AND POLITICAL COMMANDS IS PARTLY A WAY TO DEAL WITH THESE PRESSURES. MARCH VISITS TO DAMASCUS BY ALGERIAN FOUN- MIN BOUTEFLIKA AND LIBYAN RCC REP MUHAYSHI DEMONSTRATE THOSE COUNTRIES INTEREST IN INFLUENCING SYRIAN LEADERSHIP.

3. SYRIAN-IRAQI BAATH CONFLICT IS CURRENTLY ON UPSWING, BUT WE ASSESS BAGHDAD'S ABILITY TO MAKE SERIOUS TROUBLE FOR ASAD AS LIMITED. BAGHDAD, IS, HOWEVER, A MAGNET FOR SYRIAN BAATHIS OPPOSED TO ASAD REGIME, AND SARG IS UNEASY ABOUT IRAQI HOSTILITY. QUESTION IS WHICH COURSE SADDAM HUSSAIN WILL TAKE AFTER HIS RECENT DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL SUCCESSES. WILL HE MOVE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SYRIA OR WILL HE MOVE AGAINST SYRIAN REGIME? TIME WILL TELL. FOR PRESENT, PRO-IRAQI BAATHIS DO NOT PRESENT UNMANAGABLE PROBLEM FOR ASAD.

4. AS AN ALAWITE, ASAD WILL ALWAYS BE VULNERABLE, DESPITE HIS CONSIDERABLE SKILL AS A LEADER AND STATESMAN. AGAINST THIS FACT ONE MUST BALANCE PRESIDENT'S UNPARALLELED RECORD OF ADVANCEMENT IN SYRIAN POLITICS. HE HAS TAMED AND HARNESSSED NASSERISTS, COMMUNISTS, AND ARAB SOCIALISTS INTO NATIONAL FRONT. HE HAS INHERITED POPULAR GRATITUDE TO BAATH FROM EARLIER LAND REFORM. STABILITY HE HAS GIVEN SYRIA IS APPRECIATED BY THE SIZEABLE CLASS OF SMALL SHOP-KEEPERS, WHO ARE OVERWHELMINGLY SUNNI. HE HAS MADE HIMSELF ACCEPTABLE TO OTHER MINORITIES (CHRISTIANS, DRUZES). BY IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARAB STATES, HE HAS SUCCESSFULLY IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS A FRIEND OF ARAB LEADERS FROM THE LATE FAISAL TO QADHAFI. A GREATER TOLERANCE OF DISSENTING OPINION AND A LIGHTENING OF OPPRESSIVE POLICE-STATE CHARACTER OF 1963-70 BAATHI REGIME HAS BEEN WIDELY APPLAUDED. HIS DETERMINATION TO GET ON WITH LONG-NEGLECTED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS HAS PLEASED WAR-WEARY POPULATION. ABOVE ALL, PERFORMANCE IN WAR RESTORED SYRIAN PRIDE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE, AND HE HAS WON FAVOR WITH CURRENT OFFICER CORPS.

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5. ASAD WORKS HARD, HAS ACHIEVED MUCH, AND SHOWS REMARKABLE STAYING POWER. HE IS FIRMLY IN CHARGE, AND HE LOOKS AS IF HE WILL STAY HERE FOR SOME TIME. KISSINGER

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NNN

## Message Attributes

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